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# S. Africa alarmed by Soviet subs at Cape

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SIMONSTOWN, South Africa — Military, government and intelligence officials in South Africa are fearful that a Soviet naval blockade, using mines and submarines, could deal a death blow to this country's already sagging economy and disrupt the Cape sea route on which the West depends heavily.

The fears of South Africa's susceptibility to such a blockade have been heightened and sharpened in recent weeks due to increased Soviet submarine activity in the south Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

The worsening condition of South Africa's aging maritime patrol aircraft, the "spreading thin" of U.S. naval forces in other parts of the world and the mounting chorus of world opinion against South Africa on the apartheid issue have contributed to a creeping paranoia here on strategic vulnerability.

Details of the deteriorating state of South Africa's naval defenses and the intense concern over increased Soviet naval activity emerged from a series of discussions and briefings over the past few days with Deputy Foreign Minister Louis D.J. Nel and military intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Peter Groenewald in Pretoria and South Africa's top naval operations officer Commodore Victor F. Holderness at this best-equipped naval port on the continent of Africa.

The officials declined to be quoted directly but each expressed concern about the increasing Soviet maritime threat that could create a new and difficult dimension for embattled South Africa.

U.S. ships no longer call at Simonstown due to U.S. congressional concern about possible apartheid restrictions on black American sailors during shore leave. Arms embargo restrictions have blocked the United States from selling modern patrol aircraft and much-needed anti-

submarine warfare vessels to South Africa.

"There is some sharing with the U.S. of electronic intelligence from our radar and communications facility nearby," a South African naval spokesman said.

A four-page unclassified analysis made available to The Washington Times by South African naval sources revealed a startling total of 40 Soviet naval vessels now operating in the south Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The buildup has been steady since 1968.

Naval sources here point to the success of Nazi Germany's 56 submarines in sinking 138 allied ships in World War II. Today, according to the sources, the Soviet Union has 183 conventional and 179 nuclear submarines.

A blockade or even harassment of shipping at the ports of Durban, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and the Mozambique port of Maputo would effectively bottle up export activity on which South

Africa depends. It would also cut off to the West vital South African minerals.

Strategists worry that with world opinion presently tilted against South Africa and U.S. ships deployed elsewhere, it would be unlikely the United States would engage such a Soviet blockade.

Against the overpowering Soviet sub presence, South Africa has only three tiny Daphne French-made subs — a matchup roughly akin to a pollywog against a whale.

South African authorities say they would be willing to patrol the Cape routes if they had the tools but that now they are only looking after South African territorial waters.

In a recent year, 80 percent of the West's strategic minerals used the Cape route and 75 percent of the world's tanker tonnage passed the Cape.

Total U.S. tonnage (including Panama and Liberia registries) using the Cape sea route last year was 18 million tons.

Soviet "merchant" tonnage on the route was 23 million and the United Kingdom merchant navy tonnage was 26 million.

This trade resulted in the passing of 3,237 ships around Cape point last year. Most of these ships depend on South Africa for fuel, food, weather reports and search and rescue services.

The South African naval analysis said "apart from gunboat diplomacy, the Soviet maritime forces in the Indian and south Atlantic oceans must thus be seen as the military component of the total strategic onslaught against the lifeline of the free world. Since the Soviets do not have a large transoceanic trade that would need protection, these naval forces could only be intended for war and one of the Soviet naval present prime functions could be to hinder ocean shipping of the United States and its NATO allies. One place where interdiction could occur is the Cape sea route."

The same analysis criticized Western — mainly U.S. — reliance on the highly vulnerable Diego Garcia base in the Indian Ocean. "It is an ideal target for tactical nuclear weapons with only nominal risk of escalating nuclear retaliation."

The Soviet Union knows all it needs to know about the base here. A few years ago it was discovered that the South African base commander was in fact a Soviet spy. He is now serving a life term.

South African government officials feel the base at Simonstown is a key to effective Western naval presence in the Indian and South Atlantic oceans.

Simonstown offers the best-equipped naval facilities between Singapore and Gibraltar and can accommodate up to 50 warships. It has a workforce of 2,500 uniformed personnel and 4,500 civilians.

The sophisticated command and control center near Simonstown at Silvermine is capable of tracking ships, aircraft and submarines in an area enclosed by South America, Antarctica, and the Indian Ocean. The facility is underground so as to survive either conventional or nuclear attack.